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DECOLONIAL PROCESSES IN MODERN UKRAINIAN LITERATURE THROUGH THE DISCLOSURE OF THE SOVIET MAN IMAGE. CITY SPACE AS ONE OF THE IDENTITY-FORMING FACTORS¹

A post-colonial approach to literary studies of modern literature, in particular Ukrainian, has gained considerable popularity over the last decade. Clearly, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent attainment of independence have laid the foundation for the development of post-colonial studies in our territory. Injuries inflicted during the long period of colonisation (although not all researchers agree to use this term, noting the absence of a key characteristic of the colony – “a large body of water” is missing) have been understood and reflected both in literature and its researchers. However, currently we are at a stage, when writers are moving beyond the reflection typical for post-colonial viewpoints, delving into the exploration of logical connections between events and their consequences, examining ways to process these traumas. Therefore, in modern research, the decolonial approach, which emerges as a branch of postcolonial thought, is more relevant. In particular, this is discussed by Agnieszka Matusiak and Tamara Hundorova. Tamara Hundorova identifies a unique form of decolonial aesthetics in Ukrainian literature – aesthesis. This is the manifestation of the unknown, even the opposite of the generally accepted modern concept of “aesthetics” – corporeality, sensuality, and mystical practices. Agnieszka Matusiak observes that modern Ukrainian science and culture have undergone a ‘decolonial turn’ (decolonial-detotalitarian, as she calls this phenomenon, a complete shift in emphasis in discussions about Donbas). Decolonization is intrinsically linked in Ukrainian realities with de-Sovietization. While at the governmental level, this occurs through changing street names and re-evaluating Soviet political figures, people raised under this system find it challenging to shed an identity formed under vastly different values and conditions. The article aims at showcasing the depiction and transformation of the Soviet man in modern Ukrainian literature, illustrating changes that signify a shift towards a decolonial perspective. Also of interest are the aspects of traumatic memory and the identity crisis of characters, invariably linked with the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Keywords: decolonization, homo sovieticus, city space, modern literature, decolonial turn, Soviet Union, aesthesis.

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2 Yurii Kahanov, *Konstruiuvannia "Radianskoi Liudyny" (1953-1991): Ukrainska Versiia (Homo Sovieticus Identity Construction (1953-1991): Case of Ukraine)* (Zaporizhzhia: Inter-M, 2019).

3 Stanislav Kulchytskyi, Kahanov Y. *Konstruiuvannia 'Radianskoi Liudyny' (1953-1991)*, *Ukrainskyi Istorychnyi Zhurnal*, no. 6 (2019): 206-17.

INTRODUCTION

The period of colonization of Ukraine by the Soviet Union inflicted severe trauma, which, despite the active post-colonization processes over the last 30 years, continues to shape our current reality. In modern Ukrainian literature, this period manifests itself mainly through the portrayal of a Soviet man. My research aims to analyze this image in the works of contemporary Ukrainian writers.

For this research, I have selected two novels: *Dom's Dream Kingdom* (2017) by Victoriia Amelina and *Cecil the Lion's Death Made Sense* (2021) by Olena Stiazhkina. In the Ukrainian literary process of recent years, these novels vividly explore themes related to the identity of individuals born in the Soviet Union. Central to these narratives is an identity crisis, invariably linked with the Soviet era. The works raise an issue of identity, particularly, national, linguistic, religious, and local identities that are the foundation of personality. Also, all of these works address the problems of forgetting and memory (both personal and cultural), trauma (specifically, military and Holodomor-related), and the community's acceptance or rejection of others, which altogether allows developing a unified methodological framework for them, focusing on the study of traumatic memory and identity crises.

The collective image of *homo sovieticus* represents individuals raised in the Soviet Union, whose adulthood coincided with the emergence of an independent Ukraine. It is worth noting that my research will not only focus on the older generation but also on those who reached maturity around the time of Ukraine's independence, and those undergoing an identity crisis in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. This sarcastic term also applies to people who lived in the Soviet Union briefly or never encountered it, however, under the influence of upbringing or their own beliefs, developed warm feelings of nostalgia and support for the Soviet ideology.

Yurii Kahanov, in his book *Construction of the Soviet Man (1953-1991): Ukrainian Version* describes the process of shaping an individual beneficial to the authorities, who would not cause trouble.² Social factors (family, educational institutions, mass media) fostered an environment where it was difficult to form an alternative opinion, especially for the second and third Soviet generations (born in the 1930s and 1960s, respectively), who lacked alternative experience. Stanislav Kulchytskyi describes these individuals as being grown "in test tubes."³ On the other hand, Yurii Kahanov observes that the majority of citizens adopted dual models of behavior and identity in public, they were conscientious builders of communism, yet privately they treated it as a spectacle that had to be endured. However, modern Ukrainian society is heterogeneous, and despite over 30 years of independence, we observe such negative consequences as nostalgia for

4 Aleksandr Zinov'ev, *Homo Sovieticus* (Paris: Julliard/L'Age d'Homme, 1982).

5 "Vatnyk," Slovník Myslovo, August 10, 2014, accessed January 9, 2023 <http://myslovo.com/?dictionary=%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA>

the USSR (even among those with minimal or no living experience in it), inertial adaptations and paternalism, and distortion of national identity.

HOMO SOVIETICUS AS A (STEREO)TYPE. THE INFLUENCE OF URBAN SPACE ON THE FORMATION OF THE CHARACTER'S IDENTITY IN ANALYZED NOVELS

The term *homo sovieticus* was coined by Russian writer Alexandr Zinoviev, who introduced it in his 1982 novel of the same name. In this work, Zinoviev used the term in a sarcastic manner to describe his compatriots who emigrated from the Soviet Union but could not shed traits like the conformism prevalent in Soviet society.⁴ Neologism has since become deeply entrenched and continues to be widely used. In the Ukrainian language, there is a similar derogatory term, "sovok" (derived from the Russian "Soviet Union"). Also semantically equivalent is the pejorative "vatnik" from the name of warm clothing, traditionally common in Russia and Belarus, and which is persistently associated with corrective Soviet-era labor colonies; This term emerged from a Russian meme and refers to individuals who support russophile ideologies, endorse contemporary Russian politics, and harbor nostalgia for the Soviet Union. The dictionary of modern Ukrainian slang "Myslovo" provides the following definition: "vatnik or vatnyk — a person with a (post) Soviet mentality who sincerely cannot fathom why the state of Ukraine exists. The word came to Ukraine together with the Russian intervention in March 2014. The group of vatnyks is often denoted by the noun "vata." In this dictionary, the terms *homo sovieticus* and *vatnik* are almost identical (however, this dictionary is not an academic source and does not reflect an established interpretation).⁵ Observations of media and live broadcasts suggest that *homo sovieticus* and *vata* are not exact synonyms; the latter is more commonly associated with supporters of modern Russian politics. So, in my research, I will use both terms not as synonyms but within the semantic limits outlined above.

Regarding older generation, public discourse has formed a certain stereotype about this population stratum. One of my objectives is to explore whether contemporary Ukrainian authors reinforce this stereotype and how they interpret the experiences of Soviet-era individuals in the context of colonial trauma. The narratives of the chosen works span various years, both pre- and post-independence, allowing older characters to reveal multifaceted perspectives by reflecting on their 'former lives' and the changes that came with autonomy. The strategies these people adopt (ignoring differences in circumstances, adaptation, resistance) differ and partially reflect

6 Uilleam Bleker, "Post-catastrophic Urban Text and Memory in Post-War East Central Europe." *MIKS: misto, istoriia, kultura, suspilstvo*, no. 8 (1) (2020): pp. 45-53, <https://doi.org/10.15407/mics2020.08.045>

society's reaction through specific examples. In contrast, the younger generation's characters in these stories display their growth and self-expression, with their beliefs and identities primarily shaped in the post-independence era. in the times of independence.

Another important factor in the formation of identity is the place in its broadest sense. Essential factors in the construction of local identity are a place as a specific space of meanings, values, and norms significant for one particular person; primary socialization with an intimate environment; interaction within a small community; collective memory (substantial events and personalities in the historical development of the place). In our case, the identity of the characters is formed in the city's space. The works feature cities in different parts of Ukraine — Donetsk on the East and Lviv on the West. These parts of Ukraine exhibit different sociocultural dynamics and, crucially, degrees of Soviet influence. The geographical proximity to Russia is also essential, influencing aspects like intercultural connections, language of communication, and attitudes toward the Soviet regime. Using William Blacker's terminology, both texts analyzed can be categorized as city narratives.⁶ Viktoriia Amelina and Olena Stiazhkina describe specific cities with unique landmarks and stories.

I

We can see the representation of the older and younger generations in Viktoriia Amelina's novel *Dom's Dream Kingdom*. Viktoriia Amelina, a notable figure in modern Ukrainian literature, was a member of the Ukrainian PEN, and a public figure. After the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, together with the Truth Hounds organization, she documented war crimes in the de-occupied territories. She died because of a Russian missile attack on Kramatorsk on June 27, 2023. Her literary accomplishments include winning the Joseph Conrad Literary Award and



Fig. 1. Book cover
Amelina, Viktoriia. *Dim dlia Doma*. Lviv:
Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva, 2017.
Source: <https://starylev.com.ua/dim-dlya-doma>

7 “Victoria Amelina,” Eurozine, March 31, 2022, <https://www.eurozine.com/authors/amelina-victoria/>

8 Amelina Viktoriia. *Dim dlia Doma*. Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva, 2017, 381.

* all translations are mine.

9 Ibid., 79.

a European Union Prize for Literature.⁷ Her debut novel was published in 2015, and in 2017, the novel *Dom’s Dream Kingdom* was published by the Old Lion Publishing House. Originating from Lviv, Amelina aimed in her novel to portray the city, its history, and its inhabitants in a genuine and unbiased manner.

Viktoriia Amelina demonstrates different types of people that could theoretically be classified as *homo sovieticus*. This includes older people who are often subject to stereotyping, as well as the younger generation raised in the Soviet Union, struggling with self-identification, and the youngest generation, who lived most of their lives in independent Ukraine.

A central theme of the novel, as suggested by its title, is the concept of ‘home’. It simultaneously appears as a chronotope, a locus, topos, an image, and a through-and-through metaphor. The main characters of the novel are Tsilyk’s family and their dog. The story is narrated on behalf of the poodle Dominique, or Dom. It is a play on words: the name “Dom” is phonetically identical to the Russian word “dom”, which in Ukrainian means “home”. This wordplay is evident in the title, where “Dom” also resonates with the sense of “home”. In the novel, much attention is paid to the language issue, it becomes one of the cornerstones — is language important in the issue of national self-identification? Can a country be home (in the broad sense of the word) for a person who rejects its language or cannot learn it? For most characters, Russian is their native language, habitually used and only switched to Ukrainian under certain circumstances. This reflects the historical predominance of the Russian language across the former USSR republics. In particular, the author conveys her thematic concepts through the narrator-Dom. In the dog’s perception, the concept of home is inextricably linked with memory — memories of oneself and of a place, as well as the recognition of this place as home: “Home is where you are remembered — scattered like fragments of frozen rivers above the Earth [...] Our home, as long as it is with us. And we are all always in this house — each at his own depth.”^{8*}

The older generation is represented through images of Tsilyk’s married couple — Liliia Tsilyk (or Big Ba) and Ivan Tsilyk — and Mrs. Vira, their daughter Olha’s mother-in-law.

Liliia Tsilyk (or Big Ba), the grandmother of the large family, is depicted as a character who does not know who she is. This uncertainty leads to her having complexes, though she is attentive to the opinions of others: some people said about Liliia “local,” yet she never felt a part of Lviv’s city society; some referred to her as an Azerbaijani, disparagingly saying, “one of those churks,” and some called her “foreign, Russian”; when she married a Ukrainian pilot, people in Russia called her offensively “hohlushka.”⁹ Each of these labels, laden with prejudice, leaves her feeling alienated and without a sense of regional or local belonging. And the “true Lviv ladies” with a strongly expressed regional identity are particularly inclined to alienate her. Their houses clocks that

measure the particular Lviv time hang on the walls, and crucifixes that “forgive the sins of everyone who owns the walls on which they hang”¹⁰ in their view, elevate them above outsiders. Liliia Tsilyk does not conform to the stereotypical image of *homo sovieticus*. Neither the Soviet Union and its legacy nor the city she resides in have become part of her identity. This is because she has never fully grasped her own identity or felt connected to her roots. Likewise, the language barrier has kept her isolated from the community, perpetually marking her as an outsider.

One of these “ladies” was Mrs. Vira, her younger daughter’s mother-in-law. Mrs. Vira still remembered the times before the Soviet occupation. She lived in a spacious apartment in the city center, a possession she took great pride in. Back then, her home was a haven of comfort, ample space, and deliciously prepared and served meals. Her local identity was placed in the foreground. As she said, her husband was named in honor of Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytskyi, and she named her son in honor of St. Yura, the cathedral she attended while she was pregnant. Mrs. Vira lived in the apartment where she was raised and cherished it deeply. However, she had to put in considerable effort for that apartment, to reclaim full ownership of her apartment, which had been converted into a “communal” residence during the Soviet era, with separate families allocated to each room, sharing the kitchen and bathroom. Vera had a notebook with the Lviv recipes, her link to her family memory and local identity: she has been collecting these recipes her entire life trying to recreate the taste and smell of dishes that were prepared at her home before the Soviet regime’s ascendancy. Her parents had vanished without a trace, a common tragedy during the “Golden September,” the euphemism for the Soviet troops’ entry into Poland, which included Western Ukraine. This period was marked by repression, with approximately 10% of the population suffering political persecution, resulting in over a million people either tortured in prisons or still unaccounted for. Military personnel, Soviet party workers, engineers involved in industrial projects, and others in need of housing were quartered in their homes. Mrs. Vira lost touch with her regional identity because she was defined primarily by her place of residence, the “walls” that were taken from her. She tried to compensate for this trauma all her life, creating legends she passed off as precious memories and reclaiming the apartment that defined her identity.

A special place in the book is devoted to physiological sensation. Since the narrator is a dog, the story is experienced through his perspective, particularly his sense of smell. Sensations and smells provide more than just environmental cues; they also evoke memories that have long faded. The dog has the unique, albeit fantastical, ability to discern the history of people and events through their scents. This sense also extends to national self-identification, or more fittingly for the character of Liliia Tsilyk (Big Ba), the lack thereof. If Mrs. Vira collects specific Lviv recipes,

11 Amelina, *Dim dlia Doma*, 77.

12 Ibid.

13 Tamara Hundorova, *Iak Mizh Soboiu Hovoriat Peryferii, Abo Ukraina, Evrotsentryzm i Dekolonizatsiia*, Tamara Hundorova,” Krytyka, accessed January 9, 2023, <https://krytyka.com/ua/articles/iak-mizh-soboiu-hovoriat-peryferii-abo-ukraina-evrotsentryzm-i-dekolonizatsiia#footnote-14/>

14 Hundorova, 20–26.

15 Olena Stiazhkina, *Smak Radianskoho: Yizha Ta Yidtsi v Mystetstvi Zhyttia i Mystetstvi Kino (Seredyna 1960-kh – Seredyna 1980-kh Rokiv)* (Kyiv: Dukh i Litera, 2021), 31.

Liliia has many chaotic records of recipes from different cuisines of the world — Azerbaijani, Armenian, Russian, and Ukrainian. The narrator ponders what would happen if “she suddenly took it upon herself to rewrite all these recipes, with a loud title, the way Mrs. Vira does, what kind of collection would it be? “Nobody’s recipes”? “Socialist recipes”? “Recipes from everywhere and nowhere”? Yes, it would be good — from everywhere and nowhere. That’s how Tsilyks”¹¹ And Mrs. Vira’s recipes are collected all over the world, but the main difference between these two women is that “Big Ba traveled alone, and Vira kept holding on to the city that passed from hands to hands.”¹²

The author’s focus on recipes, physiological and sensual images might be evidence that a decolonial turn took place in Ukrainian literature of the post-Maidan period. Tamara Hundorova, drawing upon the theories of Walter Mignolo and Roland Vasquez and adapting them to Ukrainian contexts, suggests that decolonial aesthetics are centered around the “liberation of sense and sensuality.”¹³ And since 2009, a new practice based on aesthetics has been developing in world culture — aesthesis. The author notes: “Aesthesis in this sense is the manifestation of the invisible, devalued by modern aesthetics, which is a way of colonization. For aesthesis, the method of resistance is re-existence, which is asserted based on sense, taste, daily aesthetic, and bodily practices; aesthesis means, firstly, the decolonization of sense and sensuality.”¹⁴ It is precisely what we observe in the novel, through the detailed description of recipes and the dog’s physiological sensations, forming a core part of the narrative.

Notably, the book features recipes of various national cuisines, not the simplified ones (after all, in the Soviet Union, food was considered mere “fuel” for the body and taste was relegated to a secondary concern), reflected, for example, in *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food*. As Olena Stiazhkina notes in her study of Soviet gastronomic practices, *The Taste of the Soviet*, in the USSR, they strove for the unification of national cuisines while appropriating their best achievements.¹⁵ Since cuisine was also a colonized aspect of culture, it is not only one of the manifestations of aesthesis (focusing on taste sensations) in the novel; it is also a direct demonstration of a decolonial approach: the characters’ awareness of themselves, their roots, and rejection (conscious or not) of imposed homogenization and assimilation into a singular Soviet identity. While this culinary journey is logical for Mrs. Vira, a middle-class intellectual who only experienced grief under Soviet rule, it is quite atypical for Liliia Tsilyk, the wife of a Soviet soldier. It is as though Liliia is attempting to assemble and discover her own unformed local and national identity through the cuisine.

Ivan Tsilyk, at first glance, may seem like a typical representative of *homo sovieticus*. As a military pilot, he is accustomed to concealing his true thoughts and feelings as part of his duty. Yet,

16 Amelina, *Dim dlia Doma*, 64.

17 Skubii, Iryna. *The Material World of Children during the Holodomor or What Saved Their Lives*. Studii Holodomoru, May 12, 2020.

18 Ibid.

19 Amelina, *Dim dlia Doma*, 376.

20 Ibid., 196.

his character is far more complex. Once, his daughter spotted him amidst a crowd of nationalist youth marching down the street with Ukrainian flags. However, on the facade, he believed that “it would be better for people to do something more useful.”¹⁶ Similarly, he seemed indifferent towards his dog and always pretended to be strict with him, although, in reality, he showed affection towards the pet. This behavior is rooted in a deep-seated shame and childhood trauma associated with the Holodomor. During the years of this man-made famine, Ivan was saved because of a dog, implying a harrowing choice made for survival; the dog was likely eaten, allowing him and his mother to live, but his younger sister did not survive. Iryna Skybii in her article *The Material World of Children during the Holodomor or What Saved Their Lives*,¹⁷ notes that nature was one of the resources that saved children and their families from famine. The targets for hunting included wild birds (mainly sparrows), frogs, hamsters, and domestic animals. She states, “In these years, dogs and cats disappeared from city streets and village yards, because most of them also became an alternative source of food in times of famine” (translation. — D. P.).¹⁸ Amelina’s novel poignantly captures the bond between a child and a dog, leading to a tragic moment of betrayal necessary for survival.

The memory of his sister and the dog was so traumatic that Ivan buried it very deeply in his mind. And only once did he accidentally mention her existence to his granddaughter. However, he could not erase it: “The colonel thinks he has forgotten. But no, here is this dog, and grandmother Marusia, and the body of his sister — in completely transparent eyes.”¹⁹

All his life, the colonel hid bread crusts in an old chest — any, even stale and moldy ones. He miraculously survived the Holodomor, and the fear of food scarcity haunted him constantly. He taught even his youngest granddaughter, who is very close to him, to pick up crumbs from the table and put them in her mouth. Fears have also grown into his identity, such as the demonization of America as an aggressor and the trauma of being a war child: “Ivan was afraid of a big new war. But the promised war either never started or broke into several small wars and imperceptibly ended on TV. America was equally the country from which fighter jets with a white star flew into Ivan Tsilyk’s sky — to fight against the red star, not for life. And even the voice of this very America from the radio shell could not eliminate the memories.”²⁰ Subconscious fear remained with him all his life, so he tried to protect himself and his children in every way. In official documents, he listed his elder daughter Tamara as Russian and the younger Olha as Ukrainian, seemingly adhering to the stereotypical notion of Ukraine and Russia as elder and younger siblings. Marusia’s younger granddaughter was also registered as Russian at birth even though her mother and father were Ukrainian: “The column “nationality” never, it seems, disappeared in the USSR, only became invisible and insignificant if you write “Russian” there. It seemed simpler even in the

21 Ibid., 80.

22 Ibid., 109.

23 Ibid., 116.

24 Ibid., 157.

late '80s. It was right.”²¹ Ivan Tsilyk lived his entire life as a citizen of the Soviet Union. Even after Ukraine gained independence, he did not publicly recognize himself as Ukrainian. Moreover, his origin scared him because of the trauma of the Holodomor, so he tried not to think about it. Also, by inertia, he continued to see America as an enemy, fearing a new war instigated by the Americans. Ivan Tsilyk is a deeply traumatized person who cannot be fully labeled as *homo sovietikus*, because, for deep down, he understood the immense sorrow the Soviet Union had inflicted and internally condemned it.

The younger generation is represented by Tsilyk's daughters, Tamara and Olia. They have different attitudes toward their identities. Tamara, feeling like a minority in Lviv, identifies as a Soviet person and the daughter of a Soviet colonel. This identification conflicts with the perception of many Lviv residents who view the Soviet era as an occupation. She grapples with the dual image of the Soviet people: as victors over fascism and as occupiers, struggling to reconcile these contrasting views. Furthermore, she is convinced that it would be better if there were no nationalities and borders describing herself as torn from the soil.²² In the end, after Ukraine gained independence, she sought happiness abroad but returned to Ukraine and continued to live here, not bothering with politics. Tamara is not a *homo sovieticus* or *vata* to the full extent. Her identity is not clearly defined either locally or nationally. Her preference for living in the Soviet Union stems mainly from the material benefits she enjoyed during that time, rather than from a deep contemplation of higher concepts like national identity. This attitude is partially linked to a trauma pervasive among the Tsilyks — the lack of a true sense of home.

Olia also cannot say anything explicit about her national identity: “Maybe she is from Baku? [...] Or maybe she is from a village in Zabaikallia, where she went to first grade? Or maybe from Saratov, where she had never been because her grandmother also fled from unknown troubles along the Volga to the Caspian Sea. Or maybe Olia is from Ukraine?”²³ None of her life milestones are tied to a clear place about which one could say: this is my home, my Motherland. Despite her Soviet and later Ukrainian passport declaring her nationality as Ukrainian, Olia feels a sense of alienation: the flags, the language, and even the city of Lviv, often associated with the adjective “*Banderivskii*,” seem foreign to her. “Their” but not “our” Lviv.”²⁴ Even though Olia studied in Ukraine (first at a school in Lviv, then at a university in Kharkiv as a history teacher), her education was in Russian everywhere, so she does not know Ukrainian. Russian shapes her linguistic identity, leading her to question the need to learn Ukrainian for her teaching role, assuming that everyone already knows Russian. But even in life, Olia's beliefs are not firmly rooted; she perceives only the form without noticing the deep essence: isn't a demonstration on the first of May with Soviet red flags and a march with Ukrainian flags the same thing?

Both sisters didn't associate themselves as part of the local group where they lived.

Their daughters, Masha and Marusia, represented the youngest generations, born in the eighties. Marusia, Olia's daughter, grew up as a conscious citizen of Ukraine and even participated in the Revolution of Dignity. In contrast, her older cousin Masha, Tamara's daughter, faced a more complex sense of belonging. She considered Germany (more precisely, the Federal Republic of Germany) her home throughout her childhood and adolescence. Then she fled to St. Petersburg because she never considered Ukraine her home and did not think about her national identity. Although she did not want to return and initially lived with her aunt in Donetsk, she moved back to Lviv.

Discussing identity-forming factors, it is also worth mentioning religion, which manifested differently across generations. The Soviet Union maintained an anti-religious stance, but this was not uniformly adhered to by its citizens. Mrs. Vira, for instance, was a devout believer. She even invented a legend that she named her son after St. Yura, whose church she attended throughout her pregnancy, but her son was born in the sixties, coinciding with Yuri Gagarin's spaceflight with the peak of popularity for this name. On the other hand, the Tsilyks had a strained relationship with religion even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Only once, when Marusia fell ill and was hospitalized, Olha, in despair, began to pray to the image of the Mother of God on the wall, which she called Madonna della Likarnia. For some time, she believed that Madonna saw everything and would punish her for dishonest actions. Over time, even this fear eventually faded.

The novel has several secondary but intriguing characters that show the diversity of the older generation's portrayals. Tsilyk's neighbor, the artist Yaroslav Teodorovych, who would like to witness a new Ukraine and a new generation more than anything in the world, is an exception and a kind of extreme nationalist patriot who carried his love for Ukraine throughout his life. To achieve his goal, he even wants to quit smoking, so he could live to see the presidency of Viacheslav Chornovol, who, in his opinion, should fundamentally change everything.

On the other hand, a neighbor at the Tsilyks' dacha who, adhering to an old Soviet habit, unjustifiably reported to the police about an airplane stored in the Tsilyks' greenhouse. Another representative of the older generation is Raisa Vargina, a neighbor of the Tsilyks (the wife of the "party boss" who moved into a communal apartment in the center of Lviv in the 1950s). She is sincerely convinced that the Ukrainian language does not exist in reality, and soon the saleswoman, who has already forgotten Russian, will speak it again. These last two characters are typical, even stereotypical, representations of *homo sovieticus*.

The author, revealing the characters' life stories and their often-hidden actions, proves that age and origin do not matter; self-determination and self-awareness are much more critical.

25 Oleksii Musiedzov, "Identychnist ta misto: dosvid odnoho doslidzhennia," *Ukraina moderna*, November 5, 2016, <https://uamoderna.com/blogy/oleksi-musiezdov/identychnist-ta-misto>

26 "Olena Stiazhkina," *Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva*, accessed April 4, 2023, <https://starylev.com.ua/old-lion/author/olena-styazhkina>

Aesthesis in the novel is a tool for exposing the colonial patterns and understanding them. Thus, we can see stereotypical representations of *homo sovieticus* (Raisa Vargina, the neighbor in the dacha) and characters who, at first glance, might appear typical but reveal deeper complexities. Their primary role is to showcase the various types of individuals traumatized by the Soviet Union.

Speaking of stereotypes, it is worth mentioning the generalized image of a Lviv resident within Ukrainian society. In 2014, Oleksiy Musiedzov conducted sociological research in which he yielded a generalized and arguably rather stereotypical image of a Lviv resident.²⁵ His findings suggest that a "true Lviv resident" typically falls into one of two categories: a "nationalist-traditionalist" and "citizen-intellectual."

The first type of Lviv citizens has the following determining signs: being Ukrainian, valuing elders, family, and traditions (including conservatism and clericalism), appreciating folk art (like buying embroidery), and maintaining purity (evidenced by church attendance). The "citizen-intellectual" type, on the other hand, is marked by an urban lifestyle (frequenting cafes, restaurants, theaters), distinct language and cultural traits (like coffee culture and *gvara*, a local dialect), and a responsible approach towards the city. Also, Lviv residents, on the one hand, are individualists, and on the other, they care about "what people will say."

In Amelina's novel, native Lviv residents are portrayed similarly. The city space, along with its community, is depicted as an alien environment for the Tsilyk family. For somebody like Mrs. Vira, Lviv is conversely a space that is a defining part of her identity. Language and attitude to religion became national identity-forming factors and simultaneously factors that made it impossible to form new local identities within the Lviv community. In addition to personal factors, this is also shaped by Lviv's unique urban culture (attitude to religion, closedness, attitude to the Soviet government and its representatives or supporters). The only character who can feel connected with the city is the youngest granddaughter, Marysia.

II

Olena Stiazhkina is a Ukrainian writer, publicist, doctor of historical sciences, professor of history, and member of the Ukrainian PEN. She is the founder of the social movement "Deoccupation. Return. Education" and the author of more than ninety scientific publications in Ukraine and abroad.²⁶

Olena Stiazhkina's novel *Cecil the Lion's Death Made Sense* tells about the events from 1986 to 2015. The place of action is the Donetsk region, a part of "Donbas," which the Russians came to "liberate." The initial date of the novel is chosen intentionally, coinciding with the year of the

27 Tamara Hundorova, *PisliaChornobylska biblioteka: Ukrainyskyi literaturnyi postmodern* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2005).

28 Sofiia Cheliak, "Chomy smert leva Sesila mala sens, a kiborhiv – ni?» – Interviu z Olenoiu Stiazhkinoiu," June 25, 2021, <https://suspilne.media/142001-comu-smert-leva-sesila-mala-sens-a-kiborgiv-ni-intervu-z-olenou-stazkinou/>

Chornobyl disaster, which proved that the Soviet system had outlived itself and could no longer perform state and social functions. Tamara Hundorova views the Chornobyl disaster as a catalyst for the emergence of new literature and a belated postmodernism in Ukraine.²⁷

The setting of the novel is also significant. In one of the interviews, the author herself noted that her story could begin in Kharkiv or Dnipro. Still, it starts on the steps of the Donetsk maternity hospital, and from the opening lines, the reader sees the "Titanic" bar that emerges in the frame.²⁸ After all, reading the novel seemingly starts a countdown to Russian expansion and transforming a once-flourishing city into ruins.

Language acts as a marker of identity. The book is written in two languages – Ukrainian and Russian. This artistic technique is very symbolic and conveys the gradual departure from the Soviet identity and the acquisition of a new Ukrainian. The use of two languages is less about individual characters and more a reflection of societal changes, illustrating the transformation at the level of the average person.

The plot centers around four children, born on the same day, and their families, who chose different existential paths when the Soviet Union collapsed. For greater convenience, we will group them by family because there are quite a few characters worth it in the novel.

The novel opens with the introduction of Heinrich Fink, a Soviet official, ethnically German but a native of the Donetsk region. To avoid trouble due to nationality, he noted in the documents that he was "Russian" and called himself Gennadiy. Hoping to secure a better childhood for children with German names – a time when Soviet-German relations could yield material benefits – he convinced the parents at the maternity hospital to name the children in honor of the German communist Ernst Thelmann.

The narrative features four families: Kornienkos, Pahutiaks, Nefiodovs, and Lishkes. Kornienko and Pahutiak agreed to give the children quite ridiculous names in exchange for "a color TV,



Fig. 2. Book cover
Stiazhkina, Olena. *Smert Leva Sesila Mala Sens*.
Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva, 2021.
Source: <https://starylev.com.ua/eb-book-smert-leva-sesila-mala-sens>

29 Olena Stiazhkina, *Smert Leva Sesila Mala Sens* (Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva, 2021), 14.

30 Ibid., 178.

a carpet, two strollers, two beds, membership cards of the “Soviet-German friendship” society and an apartment in a new building, which was rented out a year later.”²⁹ The boy Kornienko was named Ernest, with an extra letter “e” inside, and the girl Pahutiak was named Thelma. All the families remained connected bound by a kind of enforced amicable-family connection.

Heinrich Fink, a German, acts as a unifying element among the diverse families, yet unlike them, he grapples with his own uncertain heritage. Fink’s uncertainty about his origins stems from a different source. His mother claimed they were either Baden or Prussian Germans, but he lacked a sense of home, having grown up in Kazakhstan where Germans from Donetsk were re-located prior to the Second World War. He studied in Zaporizhzhia because his father, a front-line soldier who fought on the side of the Red Army but was still a German, a representative of the aggressor state, was sent there to work as a form of reparation. Fink moved to Munich but visited Ukraine twice a year until he had to take care of the little daughter of Nefyodov and Anhelina. In the novel, this girl acts as a bearer of the ideas of a new, conscious generation of Ukrainians. With her, Fink switched to the Ukrainian language and acknowledged his Ukrainian roots.

His relationship with Khrystyna, a Ukrainian who speaks her native language with her relatives, further influences this transformation. Khrystyna, representing the diaspora, maintains a strong connection with her compatriots. Consequently, Heinrich Fink experiences a significant identity shift. Influenced by external events such as Ukraine’s independence, societal changes during the Revolution of Dignity, and the patriotism evident in his pupil Dina, he evolves from a German trying to be socially useful into a German of Ukrainian origin, which he is only learning to be: he learns the language, gets rid of the stereotypes imposed by the Soviet Union, and reflects on his current circumstances.

The Nefiodovy family is another crucial element of the novel, consisting of mother Tania, father Andrii, and son Oleksii.

Tania Nefiodova is a typical representative of “vata.” By looking at her example, one can witness the transformation of *homo sovieticus* into “vata.” She always strived for a perfect home and family, envied by many. However, after an unsuccessful marriage, her husband’s betrayal, and divorce, she had to start a new life at fifty. It included a new husband, a new last name (Shvets), a new profession (from a doctor to a designer), a new lifestyle, where there are trips to the opera and delicious food, and a new identity. In March 2014, the woman suddenly realized that she was “Russian” and even regretted that she had not marked this day in the calendar to celebrate as her second birthday.³⁰ Tania and Vitia both are vatniks, but the one thing that distinguishes them is that Tania wanted the Soviet Union back, and Vitia had republican views and wanted to build the empire with capital in Donetsk.

31 Ibid., 215.

32 Ibid., 193.

33 Ibid., 175.

Andrii Nefyodov is an example of an average person who, who eventually grows uncomfortable with complacency and starts to reflect on his life. But at first, he was a “surname person”, seldom addressed by his first name by parents, wife, or friends. He lived most of his life in an unhappy marriage with Tania, reminiscent of the sanatoriums for children with mental disorders in which he spent his childhood.

And only with Anhelina Pahutiak and the birth of their daughter, he started feeling and understanding what he needed. He began to think about his life not only as an individual but also as a citizen of a country that no longer exists, rethinking the lyrics of songs, the meaning embedded in them, which was imperceptibly inculcated in people, and admitting: “Now, sometimes, you get stuck on such a thing — because it sits, lurking — and then you want to hide from.”³¹ He, too, experienced an identity crisis and killed his inner *homo sovieticus*.

Lyokha (Oleksii) Nefyodov has changed the most radically — from Lyokha to Oles. He rethought his life after the start of the war. At first, he helped Ernest take animals out of the occupied territory before joining the Ukrainian front. After his return, he experienced two crises at once. The first is an identity crisis (linguistic and national): “Sometimes he is still Lyokha. But more often — Oles. He signs letters as Oles, as Oles greets and introduces himself, and responds if someone shouts his name on the street. He remains Lyokha when he sleeps, when he gets lost, when he is shy, when he wants to hide from everyone, when he gets out of bed to make such a special — as his mother used to say ‘for going out’ — appearance: ‘life goes on.’”³² And the second is a crisis of self-acceptance, getting used to losing an arm.

The Lishke family consists of father Petro Lishke, mother Mariia Lishke, and daughter Halyna (Halyska, Haska).

Petro Lishke epitomizes the Soviet man. He never thought about the origins of his (actually German) surname, his place in life and family; his sole desire was to make his family proud. But his unglamorous job and subsequent addiction to slot machines, leading to debts owed to a known bandit in the 1990s, did little to bolster his family’s pride. Consequently, Petro grappled with guilt throughout his life — firstly, for failing to provide material comforts, and secondly, for not knowing the Ukrainian language, which his grown daughter Haska cherished deeply. When shelling of Donetsk became more frequent, he continued to transport people on his trolleybus route and, for the first time in his life, he thought he was doing something heroic. And so was it. At the end of life, he finally feels like an earnest person who can change something. Reflecting on the shelling, he remarked, “It will be funny if you die from our “fire in response.” And he added: “Well, at least it’s not offensive.”³³ However, the mortar shelling that took his life was also staged by the Russian “fighters.”

34 Olena Stiazhkina, *Smert Leva Sesila Mala Sens* (Lviv: Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva, 2021), 148.

35 Ibid., 147.

36 Ibid., 148.

His wife, Mariia Lishke, serves as a stark contrast to Tania Nefyodova. In contrast to Tania, Mariia found her identity and purpose at the war front following an identity crisis. Like her husband Petro, she felt like a little person all her life, “not three-dimensional.”

Mariia had no place in life, did not see her purpose, her focus limited to feeding her family and protecting her husband, a gambler. She just never thought about her needs and desires. The onset of war prompted a dramatic change in her life. Mariia decided to turn her hobby into a life-altering pursuit, becoming a sniper at the war front. This decision represented a protest against her former self and the life she had led. A sofa was the last thread, which tied her to her old life and nostalgia for the Soviet Union, “which was fashionable and covered everyone with a copper bowl”³⁴ and was manifested in the names of institutions, conversations, and remnants of Soviet life. In the days of the Soviet Union, the couch, for many people, was an object of luxury, not a necessity.³⁵ Shooting the couch is a symbolic episode of saying goodbye to the Soviet past and the creation of a new identity for Mariia: “Mariia broke imaginary ‘plates’ with ‘Red Moscow’ perfume, which could be used to poison cockroaches, gleaming pan bottoms because that’s what good housewives do, stockings with sewn holes dabbed with nail polish to prevent tears [...] She kept shooting at her past life, at what she considered life.”³⁶ After this identity crisis moment, she went to serve in the Ukrainian army because the Russian or the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic was precisely the heiress and successor of all Soviet values that Mariia shot together with the sofa.

Their daughter, Halyna Lishke (Haluska, Haska), acts as a mediator with stories of all characters. She always identifies herself as Ukrainian, although she embraced it in adulthood. At the same time, she switched to Ukrainian and wrote a book about life in Donetsk, her family’s peculiar history, and the war. However, she is also traumatized by the society in which she was raised, so being Ukrainian is her choice against it.

Kornienko’s family consists of father Bohdan Kornienko and son Ernest. The mother, Alla, died in the hospital after giving birth from blood loss, portrayed as someone who did not know that it is possible to complain about anything. This is a rather exaggerated representation of an intimidated Soviet person and “the best medicine in the world.”

Bohdan Kornienko is caught in the past, missing his wife Alla, unwilling to change his lifestyle. In 2015, after the Revolution of Dignity and the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, he emigrated to Moscow to his mother, who had long lived there. In a letter to Haluska, he admitted that “when you live for memories, the past always wins,” and that he, living out of sync with time, did not even notice that the summer of 2014 had come, when choosing sides became imperative, his choice was simply not to die in Donetsk. However, his new community in Moscow failed to em-

37 Ibid., 168.

38 Ibid., 223.

39 Ibid., 224.

40 Ibid., 228.

41 Ibid., 187.

42 Ibid., 188.

43 Ibid., 230.

brace him, alienated by his fricative “g,” characteristic of Ukrainian pronunciation, awkward that he is “khokhol” for Russians, as they called it with contempt. Thus, stranger among others, “stubborn khokhol,”³⁷ became his new identity. He experienced a sense of belonging to a different nation, Ukrainian, and even shame for his behavior. Bohdan Kornienko is a man torn between identities, never truly finding his national belonging.

Ernest, largely neglected in his upbringing, found solace in imaginary conversations with characters from Disney animated series and “Babá,” a figure from city folklore — his first word being “Babá.” And even when Ernest grew up, his childhood love for cartoons did not disappear: “He still likes cartoons, not horror films. Cartoons, sex, and animals.”³⁸ Actually, because of his love for animals, he stayed in Donetsk when the war started. He does not know how to treat animals, but he knows people who can. This service was often used by the occupiers because they had animals they loved more than wives and comrades.³⁹ His activities served as a cover for helping those who could not leave the region (pensioners, animal shelters, and patients of a psychological hospital). “Tomorrow” has become his time category: “big tomorrow,” encompassing hopes for Ukraine’s victory, decommunization, and street renaming, and the smaller, daily “tomorrow” of immediate goals. He thinks of himself as a “coward, greedy, and fool,”⁴⁰ but he carries many people on his shoulders who wait for the liberation.

Pahutiak’s family is composed of the mother Anhelina Pahutiak and her daughter Thelma. Later Nefiodov’s daughter, Dina, was born.

Telma also was a partisan like Ernest but in a different way. Her reason for rebelling against the occupation authorities and Putin, in general, was not even Euromaidan but more the fact that he supported the “sadist Assad” who tortured the Syrians.⁴¹ Though she had always spoken Russian and did not strongly identify as Ukrainian, she went underground. Her subsequent disappearance became a “manifesto of universal absence.”⁴²

Her mother, Anhelina Pahutiak, remained in the occupied city, hoping to find the daughter. She delivers cookies to morgues and hospitals and helps people without housing, hoping she will find her at least in one of these places. Andriy Nefyodov helps her in this, but due to their complicated relationship, he helps covertly, circulating through the morgues and hospitals of Dnipro, delivering the DNA samples in the hope that his bad luck means Thelma will not be found there, indicating she may still be alive.

Dina, the daughter of Nefyodov and Anhelina and Thelma’s sister, represents the voice of a new generation, more scarred by Russia than the Soviet past. Dina is still a child but already has a firmly formed national identity. She sees that her extended family has traumas, the main one of which is “moscalization,” so she pitifully calls them “my native old ruins.”⁴³ Unaffected directly by

the Soviet Union but deeply impacted by its aftermath — the Russian-Ukrainian War — Dina thinks in mature terms and even clashes with a “vata” teacher. This conflict prompts Fink, who cares for Dina while her mother and sister are in occupied Donetsk, to consider finding a school free of the “myzhebratia” narrative (a term referring to the myth of brotherly unity among Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian people).⁴⁴ Dina’s understanding and actions spiritually unite the fragmented family. Learning of Oleksii’s war injury, she removes the arms from her dolls in solidarity, showing him there is nothing shameful or frightening in his situation. This act is another expression of aesthesis, showcasing a physiological state as a means of interacting with the world. The novel intricately weaves families with Russian, German, and Ukrainian surnames, yet none of the characters are particularly aware of their ancestral roots. For instance, Anhelina Pahutiak only discovers her grandmother was born in the village of Hrevt in the Lublin Voivodeship, initially assuming Polish heritage, until her daughter Thelma later corrects her that this is Ukrainian Boyky lands. In general, total forgetting of one’s past and ignorance of history is one of the key problems among the older generation characters. Their children, born five years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, each went their own way to learn about the world and acquire new values.

Olena Stiazhkina’s novel is fundamentally a narrative of trauma. Each member of the younger generation bears the imprint of the Soviet Union, a regime they experienced for merely five years: some inherited Soviet-era names, others a sense of inner dissonance, and some the trauma of their parents, influencing their upbringing. However, it is notable that Ernest, Thelma, Haska, and Oleksii have no fondness for the Soviet past. On the contrary, the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war forced them to choose a side, and they chose Ukraine, each in their way.

As socio-historical circumstances evolve, each older generation character undergoes at least one identity crisis, a direct consequence of the Soviet Union’s legacy. According to the results of the transformations, they can be divided into those who eradicated the *homo sovieticus* in themselves (Andrii Nefyodov, Petro Lischke, Mariia Lischke, Heinrich Fink, Anhelina Pahutiak) and those whose inner *homo sovieticus* won/transformed into “vata” (Tania Shvets, Vitia Shvets, Bohdan Kornienko). The younger generation, less scarred by the Soviet regime, still maintains a predominant national identity, even amidst urban congestion. Dina stands apart from all the characters and represents a new generation of conscious Ukrainians.

The city plays a big role in the formation of characters, particularly city legends. Here it is worth digging and talking about folklore images familiar in Donetsk. Babá and her “partner,” Shubin, are characters of regional folklore. Shubin is supposedly the patron saint of boys and miners, whom he warns that a collapse may occur in the mine or that gas has accumulated with

45 Jan Kieniewicz, *Ekspansja, kolonializm, cywilizacja* (Warszawa: Wydawn. DiG, 2008).

46 Mykola Riabchuk, *Imperiia yak dyskurs*, Krytyka, accessed January 9, 2023, <https://krytyka.com/ua/articles/imperiya-yak-dyskurs/>

47 Riabchuk, 2002.

48 Shkandrij, M. *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, 278.

a loud cough, while Babá is “in charge” of all the others. They supposedly punish bad people and do good deeds for the virtuous. Once real individuals from the region, they became guardian spirits after death, with people placing more faith in these folk miracle workers than in God. In the novel, Babá is another character in the plot, like Shubin, but they are more heterodiegetic observers, although they sometimes intervene in the fate of the characters. The latter take their existence, especially Babá's, as a given, even finding tangible evidence of their existence. While Shubin, a Russian-speaking spirit with a Russian surname, lacks a specific origin, Babá is unmistakably local, with residents able to point out where her house once stood. Confiscated during the times of the Russian Empire for her anti-imperial activities, Babá's story has since been enveloped in rumors and variations. Babá, who resembles the archetypal Great Mother, has a clear pro-Ukrainian position, is wary of the “east wind” (an obvious allusion to the state located to the east of Ukraine, which is Russia) and intends to Ukrainize Shubin.

RETURNING TO THE DECOLONIAL DISCOURSE

The literature of the post-Maidan period (after 2013) became qualitatively different from the literature written before. A stratum of military literature appeared, and questions of national identity, understanding of the past, and its connection with the present began to be raised more often in novels. So can we talk about the transition from post-colonial to decolonial processes?⁴⁵

Mykola Riabchuk, in his review of Myroslav Shkandrij's book *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times*, noted that this is a pioneering attempt to apply post-colonial research methods to the Ukrainian-Russian relations, challenging the idea that only “overseas colonies” can be the object of the imperial discourse.⁴⁶ “The question of the validity of applying post-colonial methodology (and terminology) to the analysis of Russian-Ukrainian relations can be resolved, in the author's opinion, automatically, if only one takes a careful look at the reality described by the terms “colonialism” and “imperialism.”⁴⁷ In particular, Shkandrij noted that “The term ‘postcolonial’ generally refers to the socioeconomic and cultural crises that have been caused by generations of imperialism and colonialism.”⁴⁸

Witold Mazurczak writes that many authors perceive decolonisation merely as the removal of political influence and external dependencies. However, for colonised states, the enduring effects of colonisation extend to economic, social, and cultural domains. While Mazurczak does not specifically apply this concept to Ukraine, Ukrainian authors such as Oksana Zabuzhko do in her essay *Complex of Ithaca*: “Colonialism, by turning a conquered nation from a subject of its own will into an object of someone else's, inevitably alienates it from itself, in a metaphysical sense

49 Zabuzhko Oksana, *Khroniky Vid Fortinbrasa: Vybrana Eseiŭstyka 90-KH* (Kyiv: Vyd-vo Fakt, 2001), 93.

50 Hnatiuk Oleksandra, *Proshchannia Z imperiieiu: Ukraïns'ki dyskusii Pro Identychnist'* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2005), 390.

51 Mykola Riabchuk, *Imperiia yak dyskurs*, Krytyka, accessed January 9, 2023, <https://krytyka.com/ua/articles/imperiya-yak-dyskurs/>

52 Agnieszka Matusiak and Bondar Andrii, *Vyiity z Movchannia: Dekolonialni Zmahannia Ukraïns'koi Kultury Ta Literatury XXI Stolittia z Posttotalitarnoiu Travmoiu* (Lviv: LA «Piramida», 2020).

53 Ibid., 23.

54 Ibid., 25.

sends it into exile, even without any deportations. Accordingly, the main meaning of decolonisation is the return of the nation “to its own home”, the re-possession of “itself” and all “what is its own,” from the soil to history and culture.”⁴⁹ Olia Hnatiuk, reflecting on this essay, writes: “Zabuzhko transfers this metaphor [the journey of Odysseus. — D. P.] into the field of postcolonial studies and argues that subjugated people resemble an exile, and decolonisation is a return home. Returning means establishing one’s subjectivity and therefore taking responsibility; this, in turn, leads to the ultimate need to reassess one’s positions, firstly, one’s attitude to heritage.”⁵⁰ This perspective is evident in the work of scholars who focus on Ukraine. So, this provides ground for asserting that Ukraine is indeed a part of the imperial and colonial discourse (albeit without fulfilling the conditions of the presence of “big water” and complete economic dependence). Back in 2002, in the article *Empire as Discourse*, Mykola Riabchuk defined the state of contemporary Ukrainian culture (only 11 years have passed since the restoration of Ukraine’s independence) as a struggle between imperial and anti-colonial discourses therefore “it supports anti-imperial mobilisation and the corresponding discourse in Ukrainian culture and, on the other hand, it feeds the traditional imperial discourse, giving it certain hopes for further dominance and giving its supporters a second (or, rather, twenty-second) breath.”⁵¹

Since the publication of this article, the situation has dramatically changed, especially after the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014, a crucial event in the formation of modern Ukrainian culture and society. Agnieszka Matusiak supports and develops the thesis about changing the post-colonial paradigm of perception to decolonial.⁵²

In her opinion, independent Ukraine had three important decolonial turns on its way: the Orange Revolution of 2004, the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, and Russia’s war against Ukraine, which began in 2014. She specifically refers to the latter two events as a “decolonial turn,” which she believes “catalyses the transition to a situation of decoloniality, that is, the decolonisation of knowledge and being.”⁵³ A key distinction she makes between decolonial and postcolonial perspectives lies in the approach to events, “In the decolonial project, in contrast to postcolonial optics, it is not about moving peripheral values to the place of central ones, but about the development of new trans-values that make it possible to performatively cut oneself off from the imperial-colonial logic of binary.”⁵⁴

CONCLUSIONS

Through the portrayal of Soviet-era characters in the works of Olena Stiazhkina and Viktoria Amelina, we can vividly observe these “trans-values,” which not only represent but also reinter-

pret traumatic experiences in a novel way. Each character, to varying degrees, has endured traumas stemming from the policies of the USSR. And the search for ways to overcome trauma and its consequences is a trans-value that is neither peripheral nor central. *Dom's Dream Kingdom* by Victoriia Amelina narrates about the detachment and peculiar absence of the Motherland, which manifested itself not even with the collapse of the USSR but already during its existence, as it was perceived as a singular homeland for various nations. Yet, the alienation of individuals from other nationalities by regional communities and the trauma of the Holodomor were still significant. In Olena Stiazhkina's novel *Cecil the Lion's Death Made Sense*, the identity crisis of the characters caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union is transforming and seems to receive a continuation in the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

These writers challenge the conventional, stereotypical image of *homo sovieticus* as an older person "brainwashed by propaganda" and longing for the Soviet Union. Instead, they show that regardless of age, the system of life coordinates, which is built on an understanding of traumas (or ignoring them), critical thinking (or its absence, and life "by inertia") determines a person's place in society.

Generally, the postcolonial perception of reality can be described as "Yes, we recognise that we have been traumatised by the colonial past and learned to live with it." In contrast, the decolonial perspective is more proactive and analytical: "Yes, we know exactly what traumas the colonial past gave us, and we find ways to combat them." This is not just about finding but also comprehending one's national, linguistic, religious, and local identities, as well as historical memory. The way personal and societal traumas are "lived through" and the transformation (or lack thereof) of personalities in the works of post-Maidan period writers vividly indicate that a successful decolonial transition has indeed occurred.

Local identity is shown in the works from different angles. Some characters, like Ernest in Stiazhkina's novel, are deeply rooted in it, having grown up on urban legends, while others, like almost the entire Tsilyk family in Amelina's novel, never truly integrate into their city and community. Nonetheless, the city, whether or not it is associated with home, is a factor in the formation of identity, powerful in both novels.

Whether or not the characters are based on real people is irrelevant. Each Ukrainian has a grandparent who either fondly recalls a sausage costing 2.20 rubles or painfully remembers the Soviet authorities' persecution of their family. It is an absurd reality, yet these contrasting experiences and memories, shaped by the same historical events, coexist in modern society.

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ДЕКОЛОНІАЛЬНІ ПРОЦЕСИ В СУЧАСНІЙ УКРАЇНСЬКІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ ЧЕРЕЗ ПРИЗМУ ОБРАЗУ РАДЯНСЬКОЇ ЛЮДИНИ. ПРОСТІР МІСТА ЯК ОДИН ІЗ ЧИННИКІВ ФОРМУВАННЯ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ

Постколоніальний підхід до літературознавчих досліджень сучасної літератури, зокрема української, доволі популярний останні десятиліття. Очевидно, ґрунтом для розвитку постколоніальних студій на наших теренах став розвал Радянського Союзу та здобуття незалежності. Травми, завдані довгим періодом колонізації (хоча не всі дослідники воліють вживати це слово, адже відсутня одна із головних ознак колонії — «велика вода»), осмислювала й рефлексувала і література, і її дослідники. Та наразі ми знаходимося на тому етапі, коли письменники відходять від рефлексій, притаманних постколоніальному погляду, і переходять до пошуку логічних ланцюжків між подіями та їхніми наслідками, шляхів проживання травм. Тож у сучасних досліджен-

нях більш актуальний деколоніальний напрям, який є одним із відгалужень постколоніальних вчень. Зокрема, про це говорять Агнешка Матусяк та Тамара Гундорова. Тамара Гундорова знаходить у сучасній українській літературі особливу форму деколоніальної естетики — естезис. Це оприявлення невидимого, навіть протилежного загальноприйнятому модерному поняттю «естетика» — тілесності, чуттєвості, містичних практик. Агнешка Матусяк визначає, що в сучасній українській науці та культурі відбувся деколоніальний поворот (деколоніально-детоталітарний, як вона називає це явище відносно зміщення акцентів у дискусіях навколо Донбасу). Деколонізація дійсно дуже міцно пов'язана в українських реаліях із дерадянізацією. І якщо на рівні влади вона відбувається шляхом зміни назв вулиць та переосмислення постатей радянських політичних діячів, то людям, які були виховані в цій системі, важко відмовлятися від ідентичності, яка базувалась на кардинально інших цінностях та формувалась в інших умовах. Стаття покликана через репрезентацію образу радянської людини, його функціонування та трансформації в сучасній українській літературі показати зміни, які свідчать про зміну оптики на деколонізаційну. Цікавими є також аспекти травматичної пам'яті та кризи ідентичності персонажів, яка так чи інакше пов'язана з розпадом Радянського Союзу.

Ключові слова: деколонізація, homo sovieticus, простір міста, сучасна література, деколоніальний поворот, Радянський Союз, естезис.